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ALBULA RAILWAY MUSEUM

Malcolm Bulpitt

All photo: Malcolm Bulpitt

Last December, during a private pre-Christmas visit to Switzerland I, along with our Swiss News editor Bryan Stone, took-up an invitation to visit the Albula Railway Museum in Bergün. This is located in a redundant Swiss Army building adjacent to the Station, in this attractive village sited on the Rhätische Bahn's World Heritage Albula Line. Many of you will have seen the long building on your trips over this route, or when using the shuttle trains serving the famous winter toboggan-run down the winding road from Preda to Bergün. The museum opened in the summer of 2012 and has proved to be very successful with some 30,000 visitors in its first year. In addition to these people many

others also visit the building to use the RhB's ticket office and other facilities that have transferred from the adjacent old station building. The museum building also houses the tourist information office for the Albula valley, plus a splendid café that serves regional specialities. There is also a well stocked shop with an interesting selection of merchandise.


The museum is run by a charitable association based in the Graubünden and has a small number of staff that are ably assisted by local volunteers. The association originally attempted to buy the building from the Swiss Government but they were reluctant to sell it to a then unproven organisation, so the old armoury was bought by the RhB

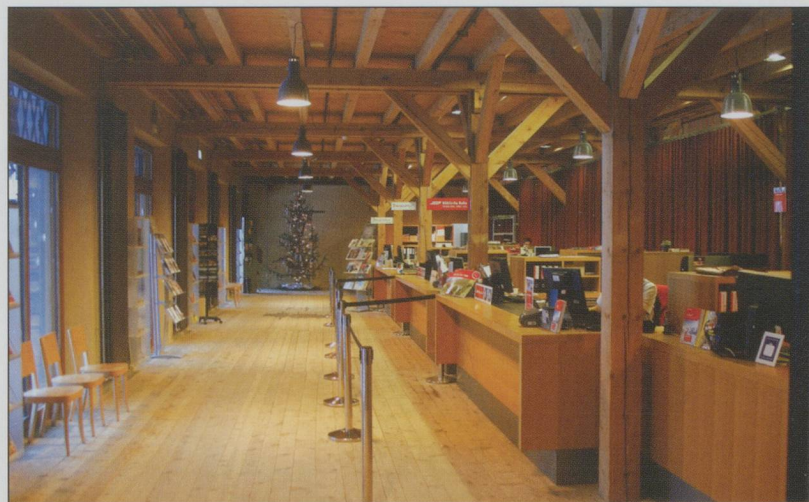


who rent it to the museum, and also support it in many other ways. The structure has been impeccably renovated and a stunning interior layout has been designed by the Museum of Zürich curator Pius Tschumi and implemented by the architectural practice of Hans Jörg Ruch and Knapkiewicz/Fickert. Along with the story of the building and operation of the Albula Railway the permanent exhibition also features the cultural history of the people and their valley. There is also an area for special exhibitions, whilst the explanatory texts in the museum are not only in German and Italian

The Om gauge model railway under construction.

but also in English. Additional features include a massive Om gauge model of the railway (this is still a work-in-progress although well worth seeing) and the preserved RhB 'Krokodile' that formerly was located nearby in the village. In one of the cabs of this historic loco the museum has set up an electronic simulator that allows visitors to 'drive' it along the tracks of the RhB. As a follow-up to their successful first year the museum has recently been nominated by the European Museum Forum as one of three Swiss contenders for the European Museum of the Year Award-2014, that will be presented in May in Tallin, Estonia.

For people who study railways, and the RhB in particular; Canton Graubünden; the social fabric of once isolated alpine valleys; the development of the tourist trade in this part of Switzerland, and many other linked areas of interest, the museum is now a 'must see' destination. Admission, by Edmonson card ticket, is reasonably priced at CHF15, with children at CHF11. In 2014 it will be open until November when there will be a short winter break until mid-December. We were ably guided around the complex by Gion Caprez and his colleague Werner Haas, whom we thank for their kind hospitality. For more information go to www.bahnmuseum-albula.ch but better still – go there. 



TOP: RhB's ticket office. BOTTOM: the café and shop.

VIERWALDSTÄTTERSEE POSTCARD

Heidi Marriott

Searching through some old postcards in Totnes on the Saturday before Christmas, I found, amongst a collection of Swiss cards, the one reproduced here. Showing an early version of the well-known Swiss panoramic map, it looks out across the Vierwaldstättersee towards Fluelen. In the left foreground is Brunnen with a steamer loading at the quayside, but of more railway interest is the Brunnen-Morschach-Bahn climbing the mountain behind the town to Axenstein. Opened in 1905, this closed in 1969 to be replaced with a bus. Snaking its way along the lakeside is the Gotthardbahn heading through Fluelen and Erstfeld before disappearing behind the mountains. On the right can be seen the lakeside steamer stops at Rütli and Treib, where



the TSB funicular is shown heading up to Seelisberg. The date of the card is unknown as it was never written and posted, but the rear is printed with a stamp-square stating a 5 rappen stamp is required. The TSB opened in 1916 so the card is after this date, however if there is a philatelist out there who knows when that rate was valid it would

be good to know. This interesting find shows that it is sometimes worth scanning through the collections of old postcards you see in second-hand and charity shops in the hope that you might find a gem. By the way, in another such shop in the old coin tin (10p per coin), I also found six current Swiss coins with a value of almost CHF5. It pays to rummage!!! 